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Ian Peddie (ed.), *Popular Music and Human Rights I & II*

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En ces temps d'élections présidentielles, cet ouvrage permet de s'interroger sur la rigidité de l'opposition entre variété et engagement politique. Yannick Noah, parce qu'il chante aux meetings du Parti Socialiste, peut-il encore être considéré comme un artiste de variété, comme c'est le cas à la FNAC ? Si c'est le cas, est-ce parce que le Parti Socialiste est considéré comme l'*establishment* et qu'on est bien loin de ce qu'il représentait dans les années 1980 ? Ou est-ce parce que Noah s'est fait connaître par « Saga Africa », diffusé à l'époque en boucle sur TF1, chaîne de la variété de droite (128) ? L'étude de Lebrun met ainsi en évidence la circularité des étiquettes et le fait que, dans les classifications musicales, les éléments véritablement « musicaux » (sons, rythmes, instrumentation) passent après les déterminations politiques et sociales. Ce qui ne représente qu'une des nombreuses pistes de réflexion de cet ouvrage riche et rigoureux dont on ne peut que recommander la lecture.

Note :

1. Cf. la recension de cet ouvrage par Dave Laing qui sera proposée dans le second volet de « Contre-Cultures », *Volume !*, n° 9-2 [Nde].

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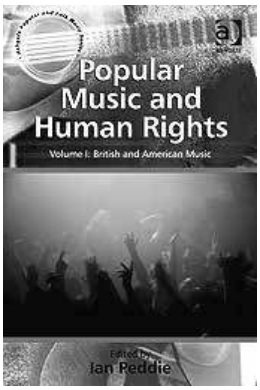
Lebrun Barbara & Franc Catherine (ed.) (2003), « French Popular Music », *Volume ! La revue des musiques populaires*, n° 2-2, Éditions Mélanie Seteun. http://volume.revues.org/2202

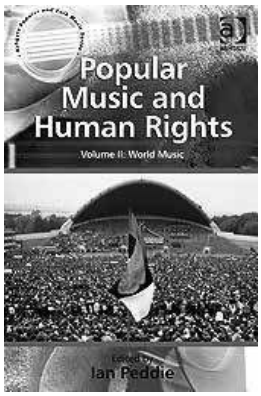
Peddie Ian (ed.) (2006), *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

Elsa Grassy

Ian Peddie (ed), *Popular Music and Human Rights*, volume I : *British and American Music*; volume II : *World Music*, Farnham & Burlington, Ashgate, coll. « Popular and Folk Music Series », 2011.

These two volumes, which bring together contributions from a number of disciplines, are based on the premise, Ian Peddie states in his introduction to volume I, that human rights and popular music "possess a mutual affinity worthy of sustained investigation" (1). Peddie argues for the "contemporary relevance of human rights", and decries their "absence" in studies of popular music (1). These volumes approach popular music, which Peddie refers to as "one of the few avenues of public expression" in many parts of the world, and "a vital means through which ideas are disseminated and opposition organized", as an important vehicle for addressing "many of the most important aspects of human rights" (1).





There is no doubt that links between popular music and human rights are worthy of investigation. It might be pointed out, however, that rather than being "absent" from studies of popular music, as Peddie claims, links between popular music and resistance to domination and social and political activism – issues which can arguably be seen to address human rights – have been the subject of a number of studies (See for example Averill: 1997, Fairley: 1984, 2000, Fernandes: 2006, Morris: 1986, Pring-Mill: 1987). Nevertheless, the studies contained in these two volumes approach popular music and human rights in innovative and thought-provoking ways, covering a wide range of genres, locations and issues from race and indigenous rights to gender and sexual violence, from punk to the impact of benefit albums and concerts, from the uses of heavy metal in Nepal to the influence of Chilean *nueva canción* on singer/songwriters in the United States of America. These studies broaden the scope of investigation into the ways that popular music intersects with activism and struggles to assert human rights around the world.

Volume I is concerned with "British and American Music". (It would be more accurate to say that it focuses on music in Britain and the United States, since – with the exception of Scales' chapter on Native Americans, which includes a discussion of Canada – none of the chapters deals with any other country in the Americas). In his interesting chapter on Billy Bragg and the British folk tradition, Kieran Cashell points out that Bragg is all too frequently seen as continuing in the footsteps of Guthrie and Dylan. Cashell argues convincingly, however, that Bragg tapped into the British folk tradition and succeeded in wresting it from the "powers of conformity", thus radicalising it and opening new spheres for musical activism. Kevin C. Dunn's well-written chapter deals with punk, showing how punk's "anti-status quo disposition", its "do-it-yourself ethos" and its "desire for disalienation" provide individuals, groups and communities with "resources through which they can articulate and actualize a localized understanding of human rights" (27). In chapter three, Deborah Finding deals with Tori Amos and how her music and her status as an artist create a space for victims of sexual violence ("arguably the most pervasive human rights violation of our time", 39) to deal with their trauma. John Hutnyk takes an innovative look at the erosion of civil liberties in the context of global terror wars, examining how "difficult" music (that of Fun-da-Mental and Asian Dub Foundation) may function to create new spaces within which to contest state infringements on human rights in the UK.

In chapter five, Stephen A. King focuses on the late blues artist Willie King and the ways in which his political narratives intersect with the

public memory of racism and oppression in rural Alabama. The film musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) is the subject of Stefan Mattessich's theoretically informed examination of cultural politics in the United States of America over the last fifty years. Through the transgendered protagonist Hedwig, argues Mattessich, issues around the malleability of identity and the ways in which authority might be contested are explored. In their comprehensive chapters, Neil Nehring and Sam O'Connell deal with the political benefit rock album and with benefit concerts respectively. Nehring provides a survey of benefit albums and questions the extent to which they raise consciousness amongst audiences, while O'Connell examines how benefit concerts can act as "a way to model the appropriate social response" (113) to catastrophes such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina in the United States.

Ian Peddie's study focuses on the late Gil Scott-Heron and his 'refusal to accept a world, a society, based on superiority and subordination' (126). Scott-Heron's music, argues Peddie, was informed by post-war struggles for independence in Asia and Africa and as such it 'serves as a bridge between narratives of rights, civil and human' (126). In chapter ten, Christopher A. Scales examines Red Power activism, Native American resistance and the music of XIT. David Thurmaier in his chapter offers a comparative study of Bruce Springsteen's and F.D. Roosevelt's positions on human rights, while in the concluding chapter to this volume Sheila Whiteley examines how the music of Joni Mitchell, Jamelia and Tracy Chapman deals with issues of women's rights.

Volume II deals with "World Music". In his introduction to this volume, Peddie affirms that "the right to imagine an individual will, the right to some form of self-determination, and the right to self-legislation" have "long been at the forefront of popular music's approach to human rights" (2). The studies within this volume examine how popular music can be used to confront issues of domination and oppression globally. William Anselmi's chapter explores "canzone d'autore" in the 1970s in Italy, and how the alternative music scene provided a space for 'criticism of a society embedded in the tensions of modernity' (14), while in his study of indigenous struggles for justice in contemporary Australia, Aaron Corn examines how a new generation of popular indigenous musicians incorporates elements drawn from traditional repertoires to express their struggle for sovereignty over their homelands.

In a fascinating study of Nepal's heavy metal scene, Paul D. Greene shows how this "highly emotional" music functioned as a means for urban middle class Nepalese youth to deal with the turbulent circumstances of their lives during the period of civil war in the early 2000s. Angela Impey examines songs as "memory markers" in South Africa, focusing in her perceptive study not on the more familiar *toyi-toyi* anti-apartheid rhythm but on "music at the margins", or the songs that women remember singing during the apartheid era and which functioned to circulate a "shared critique of domination" (51). In chapter five, Mark LeVine (66) points out that heavy metal is "excluded" from definitions of what constitutes "world music". In his study, LeVine offers an intriguing

insight into the ways that a music about death "affirms life" for young audiences seeking to make sense of their reality in the Middle East and North Africa.

Chapters six and seven deal with folk music in regions of the former Soviet Union. Valdis Muktupavels focuses on the neo-folklore movement of occupied Latvia in the 1980s, while Rajko Muršic examines popular music and human rights in the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. John M. Schechter offers an analysis of the work and the wider legacy of the Chilean (not Colombian, as Peddie writes in his introduction on p. 4) singer/songwriter Víctor Jara, who was murdered for political reasons in the 1973 coup against the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende. In chapter nine, Gerry Smyth examines how Nigel Rolfe and Christy Moore's song "Middle of the Island", and its performance with Sinéad O'Connor providing backing vocals on the 1989 album *Voyage*, act as a denunciation of the ways that dominant institutions in Ireland seek to assert control over the female body. Andreas Steen focuses on rock music in China and how it "has been embraced as a means of individual self-expression, but seems to lose itself between commercialization and self-censorship, complacency and self-sufficiency" (146). In the final chapter, Sergei I. Zhuk examines the influence of Western rock on Soviet Ukraine.

What is lacking from these volumes is perhaps an engagement with the limitations of a universal interpretation of the concept of human rights. In his introduction to Volume I, Peddie quotes UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's conviction, expressed in 2006, that a "lack of respect for human rights and human dignity is the fundamental reason why the peace of the world today is so precarious, and why prosperity is so unequally shared". However, Peddie does not define what he understands human rights to be (1). In his introduction to Volume II, he refers to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as being underpinned by 'universally accepted norms of behaviour' (2) but, as non-Western scholars such as Henriquez (1999: 107) have pointed out, there was little to no input from non-Western countries in the formulation of the 1948 UDHR. The Declaration thus reflects the specific social, cultural and ethical bias of Western capitalist powers and, it can be argued, the rights it promotes cannot therefore be seen as "universal" in any meaningful sense of the word. Stephen A. King, in his chapter on blues artist Willie King, raises these difficult issues by pointing out that "scholars acknowledge the difficulty in developing a consensus on how to define 'human rights'", and he refers to a range of phenomena (the right to life, freedom of expression and movement, protection from persecution and forced occupation, freedom to form associations and be granted some form of representation) with which the term has been associated over the years (Volume I, 68).

However, on the whole the editor and contributors appear to accept the idea that human rights are universal. The volumes hence avoid the uncomfortable questions raised by a society like Cuba, where the fundamental assumptions that underpin human rights discourses in capitalist countries (individual liberty, privacy, free speech, and free choice) are rejected in favour of discourses which privilege a more holistic and socially-minded interpretation of human interaction. In spite of these shortcomings, the studies in these volumes will be of interest to any

scholar interested in issues of popular music and the ways it can be used by groups to press for what they perceive to be their rights.

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Hazel MARSH

Keith Negus, *Bob Dylan*, Londres, Equinox, 2008.

When, during a performance in 1964, Bob Dylan was recorded referring to a "Bob Dylan mask", he provided a perfect soundbite for later critics keen to highlight the artist's seemingly deliberate manipulation of his audience's expectations. Keith Negus's short, lucid analysis of Dylan as popular music icon opens with a discussion of the mask quip, the importance granted to it by previous Dylan commentators and the usefulness of biographical information in explaining the work of public figures. To begin with, Negus neatly sidesteps the relationship between text and context by focussing on "the experiences and surroundings that allowed [Dylan] to pursue a musician's life and create himself as Bob Dylan the performer and songwriter" (8). A number of